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OUR FIGHTING FAITH  
FIVE ADDRESSES

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# OUR FIGHTING FAITH

FIVE ADDRESSES TO COLLEGE STUDENTS

BY

JAMES BRYANT CONANT

PRESIDENT OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY



CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS  
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OUR FIGHTING FAITH  
FIVE ADDRESSES



# I

## WHAT ARE WE FIGHTING TO DEFEND? \*

To members of a democracy at war a consideration of their purpose is all-important. In a society of free men and women each individual must work out his own conclusions for himself. He must fashion them from the relentless march of events through a long and searching process of debate.

Until the Japanese settled the matter for us, we in the United States were of two minds as to whether it would require actual fighting on our part to win this war. The deep conflict between the ideal of peace and the ideal of freedom was still unresolved. We as a people were torn between our hatred of war and our hatred of the Nazi philosophy of

\* An address to Harvard students over the "wired wireless system" within the buildings of the University, given at the request of the Harvard Crimson Network on January 20, 1942 — a month after Pearl Harbor.

tyranny and fear. But now the time of war has come. The dictators of the iron age have presented us with an unmistakable challenge. It is their way of life or ours. And having answered the attackers' bombs, we are determined that the fighting shall not cease until victory is won.

The road ahead may be long and arduous, and as a nation we should do well to consider soberly what victory requires. But it is not my purpose this evening to discuss this topic. Neither military strategy, nor the battle of production, nor the mobilization of trained manpower falls within the scope of this brief talk. Rather I should like to discuss the fundamental issue of this war as it affects the citizens of this country. I shall address myself to the single question, what are we fighting to defend?

During the course of one hundred and fifty years, we in the United States have evolved a unique form of society. This society is worth preserving. Unhampered by the memories and customs of an earlier feudal period, one nation — our own — has been

able to develop a representative form of government resting on universal suffrage. From the outset this government endeavored to provide equality of opportunity for all the people. The resulting social order is different from anything the world has seen before. It holds untold promise for the future. Its destruction would end an era of advance in civilization. Such in brief is my conception of what we are fighting to defend.

At times we Americans tend to underestimate how much is at stake in the continued existence or termination of our way of life. For the distinctive qualities of our heritage are not always easy to understand. The question at issue in this war between the United States and the Axis Powers is not merely the survival of one among several systems of free government. The question at issue is the life or death of a social order for which no equivalent in either ideals or practice has ever before existed. The American way of life is the product both of the deep-seated convictions of a religious people and of the pioneering conditions encountered in the opening up of

a new continent. It is a combination of freedoms and restraints, of opportunities and responsibilities, sharing many elements in common with other free systems of government, but at the same time possessing certain special characteristics of its own.

The ideal we have held before us throughout our national history has been based on freedom and equality. To be sure, as is always the case, the realization has fallen short of the dream. But for more than a century we have not relaxed our ambitions, we have not ceased our efforts to approach our goal. I do not need to call to your attention that under the disappointments of the last decade skepticism and discouragement have ruled. The emphasis has been upon our failures, the distance between our hopes and our realities has been underlined. Almost at times we have seemed to be on the point of jettisoning our faith. During the last eighteen months the object lesson of Europe under tyranny aroused us slowly. Now the wanton attack of the Axis Powers has enflamed us to action. Once again we are anxious to reaffirm the

significance of our history. Once again we sense the importance of what has been accomplished on this continent through the efforts of free men.

The accomplishments of the American Revolution by necessity bulk large in the story of the United States. But a century and a half of development of our own conception of freedom, distinct from that of England, preceded the break of 1776. And throughout the nineteenth century we pursued our own unique ideals, with our thoughts turned inward rather than outward, absorbed as we were in the great task of developing a new and untamed continent.

Today the United States and Great Britain share a common language, a common form of law, the Bill of Rights protecting freedom of speech and worship, and trial by jury; and the two countries also possess related forms of representative government. These embody principles fundamental to any nation dedicated to individual freedom. But to the tenets common to both nations the United States added from the earliest days a princi-

ple peculiar to itself — the abolition of hereditary privilege.

Among the aims of the founders of this government, the abolition of hereditary privilege was recognized as peculiarly distinctive. The inclusion of the doctrine as an avowed purpose of the nation was a new development in political and social practice. Its influence in shaping our national progress has stamped our way of life as something individual and apart. With us the doctrine of equal opportunity — opportunity for all — has been part and parcel of our belief in individual freedom. It is a touchstone of our heritage, that heritage which today we are fighting to defend.

It was not so much the frontier as the *ever-moving frontier* which left so deep an imprint on the American way of life. "They were all hungry for the horizon." These words were used by a writer in describing a family of typical Americans who, generation after generation, moved farther west — a family of pioneers who saw more than one of their children mount the ladder to fame and fortune. As a people, we citizens of the United

States have for a century and a half thirsted and hungered for that distant misty line that separates earth from sky. So long as we suffer from this restless appetite we need never know despair. So long as we have the courage and boldness of the adventurer in the wilderness we shall never know defeat. We may face with confidence both the manifold adjustments to a total war and the perplexities of modern industrialized life in a post-war era. In short, we may resolutely answer the challenge of the would-be dictators of the world.

To be sure, many in the past years of disillusionment have asked, "Can our heritage derived from an earlier period endure in the modern age?" In facing the defeatism prevalent on this question, there is one bit of evidence that should not be overlooked. If there had been no counter-currents in our history, one might be more pessimistic about the future. If the entire record had been one of uniform and progressive development of the American way of life, of a steady and uninterrupted approach to a goal of a free society

without hereditary privilege, one might be discouraged by the events of the last forty years. One might say that all the great achievements of the past must be gone forever; that they belong to the age of the powder horn and the musket, of the clearing of forests and the ox team; that industrialism and big cities have rung down the curtain on our special American drama; that we must begin anew. One might then assume that we could not meet the dictators of the Axis on their own ground and emerge other than a totalitarian state.

But when one considers all the vicissitudes of the American ideal in the last one hundred and fifty years, there seems little justification for such a defeatist verdict. From 1776 to the present day there have always been powerful groups among us giving only lip service to the American creed. Inarticulate but strong social and economic powers have always existed, working against the development of a free society. In large sectors of the country and for relatively long periods of time, reaction has prevailed. Often there has been

movement away from, not towards, the American ideal. In spite of all this, however, the republic has survived and on the whole moved forward along the appointed course.

In a long and arduous journey it is sometimes heartening to recount the hardships which have been endured. The record of difficulties surmounted cheers one on. In that sense a survey of the seamy side of American history is worth while. For if one is to look to the future sanely it is essential to balance honestly the bad of the past with the good. Personally I rejoice in all that has been brought to the surface by the "debunking" of pleasant myths of our achievements as a nation. As soon as the novelty of contrasting these new readings of our history becomes outworn, the real significance of the revelation will be plain to all who read. By demonstrating that the heroic age of our founding was peopled with human beings with motives quite as mixed as those of the present day, the concept of a miraculous Golden Age forever vanished has been broken and destroyed.

The real miracle stands out more strikingly than ever. In spite of the machinations of corrupt self-seekers, in spite of the growth of a variety of vested interests, in spite of ruling castes and vicious cliques, in spite of all external pressures and internal trials, a nation of free men survived and prospered. And, what is most incredible of all, became more firm in adherence to the ideals made explicit in the founding. Even at the lowest point of the up and down swings of our national history we have never ceased to be partisans of the free way of life. We have never repudiated the fundamental premise of our civilization, the premise alike of Catholic, Protestant and Jew, a belief in the dignity of the individual. And it is our freedom to hold this belief which has been imperiled by the successes of the armed might of the Nazi state. For, let us never forget, it is this belief in the dignity of the individual man which is denied, condemned and ridiculed by those in power in totalitarian lands.

How hard it is for the people of a free country to imagine what it means to be sub-

jects of a regimented state! How difficult it is for us to conceive what it means to live in a conquered land! How few realize the hour-by-hour existence of those who are "gleich-gestaltet"! Such words as secret police, machine gun and concentration camp bring to our minds no real pictures. They have less emotional effect than the words operating room and ambulance — grave words which connote to many the realities of human suffering. The average citizen of the United States has led such a happy, free and secure life that he has been incapable of imagining either the true nature of the Nazi party or the life of those who live and suffer under the rule of Hitler's agents. This is why we as a nation faltered so long in our decision to enter the war with unstinted energy and determination. This is why some among us still cling to the belief in victory through the collapse of Germany from within.

Those who once blithely said, "Nothing can be worse than war" and "I would as soon live under Hitler as Chamberlain," have for the most part long since changed their minds.

But there appear to be a goodly number who believe that peace will come through the uprising of the conquered peoples and the revolt of the better elements in Germany. Those who argue thus are, to my mind, living in an unreal world. They fail to realize how modern methods of communication and modern weapons assist the arbitrary rule of the many by the few. They fail to comprehend how widespread are the activities of the fanatically devoted Nazi agents in Germany and in the occupied lands, how many co-workers these agents can enlist and what power these groups exercise in an industrialized society. The telephone, methods of radio communication, the armored automobile, the airplane and the machine gun are to the modern dictator what armored knights were to the landlords of the Middle Ages. The peasants were cowed and obeyed in former times; today it is all but the members of the ruling party who must suffer and be silent. Those who cannot put their hands on modern weapons are helpless. The embattled farmer with his shotgun long since passed from the

historical stage. But the barricades of Paris of the Commune of 1870 are almost as far away.

To my mind, there can be no escape from the conclusion that only a decisive military victory can terminate this war. Our distinctive way of life on this continent cannot be preserved unless we defeat Japan, Germany and Italy. Therefore, the first task before us is by necessity a military one. But if we win this war and lose our freedom, our vision of opportunity for all, our hope of realizing a free and classless nation — we shall as a nation have lost the decisive battle. The problem of moving towards our ideal of a free and classless society while engaged in total war is difficult, we must admit. All the more reason why each and every citizen must labor towards this goal. We must face internal difficulties and dangers as realistically as we face our hostile foe. The situation is not made any easier by the impact of the economic problems of the last decade.

This challenge is now before us. All who believe in the virility of our birthright should

stand united to see to it that we fight effectively and at the same time preserve our freedom. To this end we must guard jealously the Bill of Rights and the civil liberties which are guaranteed by the Constitution and the traditions of this country. Let us be careful in watching against the fifth columnists within, for undoubtedly there are many. But let us be equally zealous in guarding the rights of our individual citizens. It is unfortunately true that reactionaries and radicals alike have often taken refuge under a slogan of "Protect the Bill of Rights." We all know how readily communists, whose regime if it came in power would destroy freedom of speech, have demanded for their protection these same freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution they would destroy. We have also seen reactionaries declaring for the restoration of our liberties, when what they meant was the repeal of some particular legislation affecting adversely their own interests. The result of these repeated appeals to the Bill of Rights by extremists on either side has been one of the causes of the widespread skep-

ticism about American ideals in general. It will be a temptation in time of war to use the threat to our national existence to enforce points of view which are fundamentally hostile to the very freedoms we are fighting to defend.

Therefore, if we are to do our double duty in the grim days ahead, we as citizens of this republic must not only give unstintingly to the war effort, but we must also struggle to maintain the fundamentals of our nation — freedom and equality of opportunity for all. To this end we should examine critically every proposal that comes before us. We must jealously guard the democratic process, local responsibility, universal public education. We must see that individual responsibility and initiative are honored as never before in industry, in government, in the Army and the Navy. We must demand the recognition of merit, the discounting of hereditary privilege, and the rapid promotion of those who have capacity to serve.

The very existence of a national crisis may be used if we so desire to inject a greater de-

gree of mobility into our social structure. We can make it easier, not harder, for young men of ability to find a proper outlet for their talents irrespective of their parents' income. To be sure, modern war accentuates the role of government, limits the opportunities for fresh enterprises initiated by groups of men with imagination and courage to take risks. It drains off into war industries those boys in high school who have little financial backing while others of more wealth go on to college. To that extent mobility is limited, the social structure becomes frozen. But on the other hand, if popular opinion so demands, government and industry can operate in such a way as to force to the fore the idea of "careers freely open to the talented."

I am sure the invisible audience I am addressing will agree that it is not enough to answer the question, "What are we fighting to defend?" in terms alone of the past and present—in terms of our heritage or the measures to be taken in times of war. We must face the problem of what we as a nation of free men should do once the fighting

ceases. The day the Nazi regime collapses will be the beginning of a new era — the era of reconstruction. Anarchy in Germany and the enslaved lands will be the certain signal that complete victory has been won. It will be the sign that the military struggle is over. But it will also be the sign that a new set of problems confronts the world. When the Gestapo agents are on the run, the destruction of the Nazi tyranny will have been accomplished; another assignment will then await us. The first immediate step will be to organize a temporary basis for insuring order. This must be done even before considering ways and means of rehabilitating civilization. At that moment the United States must be ready to assume political and economic leadership of the world. We must be prepared to follow through the military victory by assuming our share of the burdens of reconstruction.

A few days ago it might have seemed bold to argue that the United States should take an active part in international collaboration. Today the case needs no documentation. In-

deed, when the fighting ceases, I believe it will be taken for granted that this country must assume leadership in establishing peace and order. Isolationism will be as extinct as the volcanoes on the moon. For we in our time have seen the world contract before our eyes. The threat of Japan's air forces has taught us an enduring lesson. The flight from reality of the 1920's will not again be repeated while any of the present generation are still alive.

It is too early now to attempt to specify the details of a post-war settlement. But it is not too early to discuss the broad outlines of the sort of world we may hope to live in once Hitler is defeated. We are now fighting to defend our American way of life. When the fighting ceases we must be equally vigilant in preserving this way of life during a period of readjustment. We must in particular guard with a jealous eye those characteristics which are the product of our own unique heritage. This cannot be accomplished, however, without an active participation in a reordering of the international scene. When peace comes

we shall have to face the fact that the privileges and responsibilities of world leadership are ours. But we shall have to steer a careful course laid out with a true understanding of both ourselves and the other peoples of the world. On the one hand, the errors of the isolationists of 1919 are to be avoided. We cannot bury our heads in our own internal problems. On the other hand, we must avoid the dangerous assumption that we can impose our way of life on other countries. For it has been pointed out that the present conflict is to some degree a vast civil war. On an international scale as well as in our own country we shall have to face unflinchingly the latent conflict between the "haves" and the "have nots." To quench the flames of war will not suffice; the smouldering embers must be uncovered and extinguished. We shall have to understand how much the rise of Hitler in Germany and the disintegration of France were due to the inherent weaknesses of a stratified society. Here in the United States, because of our history and other favoring circumstances, we have the possibility of resolv-

ing in one special way the clash between private property and universal suffrage. By approaching more nearly to our ideal of a casteless nation we may be able to retain the benefits of private initiative in industry and preserve a true political democracy. Admittedly the undertaking will be difficult here. How much more so will it be to attempt to extend our own particular solution to other lands!

We must be prepared, therefore, at the outset to have the process of reconstruction proceed slowly, very slowly. There can be no magical restoration of freedom, peace and happiness for all. Furthermore, we must be prepared to have different forms of free societies and recognize the merits of each. Political dogmatism and a holier-than-thou attitude on the part of the United States will be of little help. But in our willingness to make haste slowly and to be tolerant in our understanding of the development of other types of social structures, there can be no compromise on one fundamental issue. We shall have to insist that the final international order will

be based on freedom. For in the modern world of contracted distances and complex industrial interactions, tyranny and freedom cannot live in peace.

The bitter fact that must be faced in the modern world is that there are only two kinds of neighbors that can be trusted to keep the peace: one is a nation with small industrial resources, the other, a society with a will to peace. Until we are absolutely certain that Germany and Japan have been transformed by hard circumstances into the one or the other, there can be no hope either of eventual disarmament of other countries or of an enduring peace. Grim necessity requires that unconditional surrender of the Axis Powers be the first war aim of the United States.

The second of our war aims should modify the first. An unconditional surrender does not require a Carthaginian peace. The Axis Powers must surrender at discretion, to use an ancient military phrase. But we in the free countries, and particularly in the United States, must be ready both to formulate plans to carry out the responsibilities of the victors

and to shoulder our share of the load of a difficult and thankless task.

The will to peace of free democratic countries has been proved during the last three years beyond doubt or question. A free people will not readily engage in a modern war. This much seems certain. Hence, if freedom is to be protected once the Axis Powers are beaten, potential aggressors must be too weak to strike. An armed association of free societies must stand ready once this war is over to serve together if need be, not to impose their form of government on other people, but to prevent the growth of new challenges to their freedom. If this is done without malice on the one hand, and without seeking the refuge of illusions on the other, we may hope that international order will be restored. We may hope that in the distant days to come our instruments of war will grow less obtrusive, and that our children's children may walk boldly and with confidence along the enduring paths of liberty and peace.

## II

### OUR UNIQUE HERITAGE \*

THERE is no need to remind the members of a University community of the transformations wrought by the war in the academic scene. In one way or another the struggle in which we are engaged has affected the plans and programs of nearly every one of us. But it is not only our plans for the immediate future and the routine of our lives which have been revolutionized. The nature of our thinking as a nation has been fundamentally altered. Now that the threat to our philosophy of life has taken the form of aggressive enemy action, now that we are involved in a life and death battle for our freedom, we realize as never before the implications of our democratic faith. We have been led to probe more deeply into the background of

\* An address delivered before the opening Convocation of the first war-time summer term of Harvard College. June 30, 1942.

our national culture, to reëxamine the fundamental basis of what we call the American way of life. We have been called upon to revitalize those ideals which more than a hundred and fifty years ago were the revolutionary proclamation of the ambitions of a new society of free men.

Hand in hand with this renewal of our faith in the development of a free society on this continent has come a recognition that the days of isolation are gone forever. We harbor no illusions that the United States can take a few years off to win the war and then return to normalcy. On all sides it is now recognized that the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor ended an era of attempted American aloofness from the world. A long hard period of reconstruction awaits civilization after the war is won. And in this process the United States must take a leading part.

It has been said repeatedly that this war is a fight for freedom. Every day underlines the fundamental differences that divide free people from those who govern in totalitarian lands. No longer is it necessary to argue the

complete incompatibility of Hitler's regime and our American way of life. The American people are now determined that with all the military might at their command they will sooner or later crush the militarism of Germany, Japan and Italy. But after this task has been accomplished, and it may well take many years, the fight for freedom must continue if individual liberty is to survive. As the Secretary of the Navy said here on Commencement afternoon, freedom is not something that can be given a people. Freedom must be achieved by each generation for itself. And the problem of achieving liberty for the individual in a world where distance has been almost obliterated by the airplane, and where mass production threatens to make man a victim of his machines, will require all the fortitude and understanding we can muster. It will require knowledge and wisdom combined with such a passion for liberty that the needed sacrifices will be gladly made.

To my mind, liberty like charity must begin at home. Here in the United States we

have an unparalleled opportunity — an opportunity to realize those ideals which cluster around the magic words freedom and equality. This opportunity depends, of course, in part on favoring economic and geographic factors. But it also derives in no small measure from the traditions of the republic. Therefore an understanding of the essence of these traditions is of the first importance. For it is only by understanding them that we may realize to the full their effectiveness as social forces.

If in the iron age of war and mechanization we in this country can demonstrate that individual liberty and representative government can survive and the nation prosper, then our example will radiate the spirit of freedom throughout the world. On the contrary, if we fail, a long winter's night of tyranny will descend upon the earth. It behooves us then to understand our national heritage and rework it into the pattern of the modern age. In so doing we are at one and the same time zealous Americans and active agents for freedom in every spot upon the globe.

Our national heritage has many elements in common with those of other free nations. We all recognize our debt to English law and English forms of government, and we are well aware of the influence on our thoughts and institutions of the eighteenth century rationalists of France. No country develops in a vacuum; human liberty is the product of no one people or no one land. But there have been certain special features in the evolution of the United States which make it proper to speak of our national heritage as something apart, as having characteristics of its own — in short, as unique. And it is on these special features that I wish to dwell tonight.

“Western democracy,” wrote the historian Frederick J. Turner, “through the whole of its earlier period tended to the production of a society of which the most distinctive fact was the freedom of the individual to rise under conditions of social mobility, and whose ambition was the liberty and well-being of the masses.” Today in a complex interconnected world, in a nation of cities and enor-

mous industrial areas, we are faced with the question of how the two ambitions which Turner lumps together, "liberty and the well-being of the masses," can be fused. For we have recognized that the one does not by necessity imply the other. For example, in this self-governing republic of free men we have recently lived through a period of vast unemployment, while during the same years in certain totalitarian countries full employment ruled. We have seen that a breakdown in the maintenance of material well-being for a considerable portion of the population may occur in a democratic nation. At the same time we recognize that a totalitarian regime may bring material well-being to the many even though liberty itself is despised at every turn.

To my mind, there lies one promising and too often neglected road which we in this country may follow if we wish to reconcile these two ideals of liberty and widespread material well-being. We must reaffirm a cardinal article of the early American faith. We must recall that the denial of hereditary priv-

ilege was one of the basic principles of the founders of our government. And we must never forget in our discussion of the lost frontier that at the frontier itself there was no perpetuation of a privileged class. The opportunities of free lands and an expanding economy recreated equality of opportunity for the members of each new generation.

A pioneer community is the antithesis of a stable, sophisticated, urban civilization. The men of our frontier were not concerned with the past. They were little bothered by tradition or custom; what stability and order they possessed came from the needs of the present, not from an inherited pattern. The problems which spring from mutual antagonism between ancient social or racial groupings did not arise to trouble them. Whether one considers the pioneer agricultural communities on the eastern frontier just after the revolution, or the successive advance settlements beyond the Alleghenies, or the mining towns of later days, the situation was the same. A relatively homogeneous population in which every man felt himself as good as

his neighbor was starting fresh to build for the future.

This statement is of course an oversimplification. The conflict with the Indians and the existence of negro slavery fall outside the suggested pattern. These factors, however, did not greatly modify the course of our pioneering growth. The final result of the long struggle with the Indians left no enduring problems of conquerors and oppressed such as have determined the course of much of European and Asiatic history. For the original inhabitants of the continent, few in number, were pushed aside rather than incorporated in the expanding civilization. And in the sweep of new settlements, the effect of slavery on the social development of the frontier was small. As compared with European society, the scene was devoid of group struggles and oppressed minorities; serfs and rich landlords, bourgeois and princes, were conspicuous by their absence. The intense struggle which characterized our national progress was a race of individuals rather than a tug of war between contending groups.

Change, not stability; hard work, not leisure; rewards for initiative and boldness, not assurances of security and safety, characterized pioneer life throughout the expansion of the United States. Whether a new adventure was agricultural, or commercial, or mining, more often than not failure overtook it. But always the prospect of moving on or of trying their luck at something else tempted men to new endeavors. There were prizes to be obtained, no doubt of that. And some obtained them. But even in periods of retrogression, there were few thoughts of ultimate defeat. People made money, lost it and made it again. And in the stable and older sections, panics and depressions gave the same sense of a spirit of restless change. The element of flexibility, of incessant movement, was universally characteristic of the first century of our national life.

In spite of slavery, of the landed aristocracy of the South and the families of seaport merchant princes, in spite of later industrial barons in the North and East, the ideology of the United States remained fixed in its rejec-

tion of the doctrine of inherited privilege. The idea of social or economic classes perpetuated from one generation to another was repudiated on all sides throughout the nineteenth century. Even the radicals who thought and spoke of a socialized nation were largely untouched by the doctrines of Marx — doctrines founded on the idea of a class struggle.

How powerful was the ideal of a classless nation — classless in a unique American sense — is demonstrated by the way in which the problem of the immigrant was handled in the late nineteenth century. Unlike the newcomers of an earlier period, the immigrants of this period settled not in the open spaces but in urbanized industrial centers. They arrived at a point in both time and space when large sections of American society were rapidly undergoing a social stratification. These new aliens might have become a class apart, permanently differentiated by their language and foreign culture, and permanently assigned to an inferior economic status. The fact that this did not occur is of prime signif-

icance. But more important still are the underlying reasons why the American people repudiated such a solution of their industrial problem.

A statesman of the sixteenth century, conversant with the history of the human race only to that time, and suddenly dropped in the United States of 1900, might have asked some strange questions. He would have been particularly skeptical about the then current zeal for Americanization of the foreign born. "The recent immigrants," he might have remarked, "came here of their own free will. Certain nationalities, relative newcomers to this continent, have taken humble positions in a great industrial pattern. Some must be the hewers of wood, the drawers of water. Why not let these foreign immigrants and their descendants play this role? Fate has solved for the United States the labor problem." Our visitor might have continued, "You did not have to conquer another nation and make the outlanders do your bidding — other nations have come to you for this very purpose. Do not 'Americanize' them, let them

keep their own cultures, their own languages; it will be easier to place them in the social scale."

So might have argued a cynical and worldly-wise visitor of four centuries ago. Just what would have been his fate I am not prepared to say. At least tar-and-feathering. Such direct action by the mob would have illustrated one of the grim and unruly elements which are also part of the American heritage. But the significant fact is that this so-called "realistic" view would have shocked the overwhelming majority of Americans in 1900. A point of view quite reasonable to many a social philosopher of other days would not have received a hearing in the United States at the turn of this century. For here it was accepted as an axiom that these newcomers — once they were naturalized — were citizens with full rights. Their children were as much Americans as the children of those families who had first crossed the ocean eight generations earlier. There was no question of establishing the descendants of one group of immigrants in

any one vocational level. No one would have dared breathe this idea openly. Half-consciously we in the United States recognized that if our ideals were to be preserved in an industrial society it was more essential than at an earlier time to amalgamate completely these newer arrivals. Therefore, a campaign of Americanization and of education sprang forward on all sides. The results of this unconscious decision on social policy will affect the future of this country for years to come. Already the once widely discussed problem of the "melting pot" is beginning to fade. The first World War and subsequent legislation diminished the flood of immigration. In the meantime, the process of amalgamation had begun to show results. In the 1940's the phrase runs, "we are immigrants all." We recognize today that this nation of which we are citizens carries forward a cultural stream to which many nationalities and races have contributed a vital part. No walk of life is reserved for those who are predominantly of one racial strain.

The historians of some centuries hence,

surveying the United States of the early twentieth century, may be inclined to ponder on the puzzle of this self-denying ordinance of those in power. Even today some may wonder why when the tide of immigration was flowing strong the older inhabitants strove to assimilate the newcomers on a basis of complete equality. Yet a failure to understand the answer is a failure to understand the true nature of the United States. An ideal proved more powerful than self-interest of the moment; the ideal of freedom and equality rode down the economic forces which were forming separate classes. The principle of no hereditary privileges still dominated the American dream. He who penetrates the apparent mystery will know the power of the American ideal; he will have comprehended the significance of that unique heritage which today, in the year 1942, is still ours.

To win this war and to build new bulwarks to protect freedom after the war is won, we have need once again for the passionate devotion of the pioneer. We need both his love of liberty and his concern for the welfare of

the average man. But the spirit of the pioneer is restless; it can never be contained within a society whose structure has become rigid through crystallization. If we are to continue the frontiersman's ambition in this country, we must have a society almost as flexible as the one he knew. We must reverse the trend of the last fifty years and restore a high degree of social mobility. We must curtail hereditary privilege and extend the doctrine of equality of opportunity. The path is difficult but not impassable. To me, it seems the most promising road by which America may traverse the present barbarous wilderness of slavery. To me it appears the route which we must take if we are to emerge triumphant in our struggle — a struggle to realize for all our people the potentialities of a mechanized civilization and still stay free.

### III

## “IN THIS COUNTRY THERE ARE NO CLASSES” \*

WHAT can any speaker say to a graduating class in the tragic hours of a world catastrophe? Your numerals, 1940, will stand in history as marking one of the fateful years of this century. That much seems certain. But that is, perhaps, the one prediction that can be made with any confidence this afternoon. The days ahead are hidden in a black fog of uncertainty and fear. This is no time for academic generalities. Western civilization, of which the United States is an integral part, is now passing through a storm of hurricane proportions. Yet, while we cannot minimize the dangers, let us also not exaggerate them. One way or another, much that we value will ultimately survive. Unlike a boat, a civilization does not founder overnight. Rather, like

\* Baccalaureate Sermon delivered in the Memorial Church of Harvard College, June 16, 1940.

a forest it suffers only passing damage. Given time, the scars are healed; given time, the havoc will be effaced, supplanted by new stands of vigorous trees.

How can we minimize the damage of the world hurricane which blows on our civilization with a totalitarian force? This is the problem which confronts us today. Above all, how can we insure that the wreckage on this continent will be so small as not to warp the development of our national life? Viewed as an immediate strategic problem, these questions lead at once to considerations of the nation's military and foreign policies. On the latter, public opinion is divided — less sharply than a month ago, but still divided. Divided, I believe, not primarily because of any differences in fundamental aspirations for this country's future, but rather by differences in prognosis as to the outcome of military events in Europe and the subsequent behavior of possibly triumphant totalitarian states. On these matters of current controversy I shall not dwell this afternoon.

I ask you to consider for a few moments

another factor which will determine the extent of the wreckage in this country in the next few years. For some devastation will occur whether the predictions of isolationists or of interventionists are proved correct. Already there exists a menace to our national integrity, our democratic form of government, our free institutions. How successfully the threat will be resisted depends largely on the spirit of the people. The morale of your generation and of mine will be a potent factor in determining the course of our national life.

Harsh words have been used about both of us — the middle-aged, and the generation now in college. Fathers and sons alike have been subject to attack. But our alleged faults are not the same. We, the middle-aged, have been accused of gross cupidity and stupidity coupled with negligence and irresponsibility. You are accused of bad manners, cynicism, lack of idealism and lack of courage.

This is not the time or place for me to plead extenuating circumstances to excuse the errors and follies of the older generation.

Nor would it be fitting to defend you gentlemen and your contemporaries to your face. My opinion is that young and old alike have been suffering for some years from the same fundamental disease — creeping paralysis of our loyalties. This pathological condition is doubtless due in no small measure to improper diet, an improper balance of ingredients in our spiritual and intellectual daily fare. Unless this improper balance can be corrected rapidly, there is a chance that we may have too little stamina to carry through successfully some of the tasks that lie ahead. Unless you and I and your contemporaries and mine can revitalize our loyalties, we shall be weak when we should be strong, divided in our counsels when an emergency demands in the highest degree the unity of all.

May I suggest a reason for this fundamental trouble? Does not the reason lie in our failure to maintain a staunch position as cultural isolationists? Notice, please, the adjective cultural. I am referring to our social philosophy, not our foreign policy. We have been too receptive to cultural and social tra-

ditions from foreign lands. We have suffered from undernourishment — from a lack of our own vitamins, the products of our own unique heritage. We have suffered from an oversupply of imported social and intellectual ideas and standards. The only basis for a strong loyalty, it seems to me, is first, a realization of the vigor and uniqueness of our own tradition; and second, a determination to make our future a living embodiment of our past ideals. This is the only basis for the unity of all economic groupings in this country. Without this we may well be lost for years to come.

Let me illustrate by being specific. Let me consider the tradition of this University. To you, gentlemen, on this occasion I can speak of Harvard matters without appearing either boastful or parochial. We are proud of three hundred years of history full of heresy and dissent. We pride ourselves on our belligerent belief in individual freedom. But if this is merely freedom within a clan, it has little significance for those outside. The importance of this College or any college to the

nation turns on its attitude to the country as a whole, on its social philosophy, if you will. Here, too, we have a great tradition, but one I fear some of us at times are likely to neglect in many of our actions.

In his inaugural address four years after the close of the Civil War, President Eliot spoke as follows: "Harvard College is sometimes reproached with being aristocratic. If by aristocracy be meant a stupid and pretentious caste, founded on wealth and birth and an affectation of European manners, no charge could be more preposterous; the College is intensely American in affectation and intensely democratic in temper. But there is an aristocracy," continued Mr. Eliot, "to which the sons of Harvard have belonged and let us hope will ever aspire to belong." He then proceeded to specify the hallmarks by which such a group of aristocrats may be known. In brief, these were integrity of character, excellence of performance.

These words which sum up the Harvard tradition come to us from a faraway time. To the iconoclastic fourth decade of the twen-

tieth century they have an almost alien flavor. Yet they breathe the essence of our American heritage. They come to us from the fiery ordeal of the Civil War, from a time when man struggled with confusion and despair. These words have overtones which are lost on any who do not understand this country's history. Their failure to evoke a strong emotional reaction from the present may be taken as a measure of our lack of nourishment from the richness of our past. Their tone is at once democratic, "intensely democratic," to use Mr. Eliot's own terms, and yet proudly aristocratic. By implication they applaud a differentiation among men. Yet the speaker rejects emphatically a differentiation based on "a stupid and pretentious caste, founded on wealth and birth." There are no connotations of inherited fortunes or titles in the word aristocracy as President Eliot used it. He spoke of an aristocracy of achievement—the aristocracy that springs from the minds and hearts of each succeeding generation. This Harvard tradition is both aristocratic and democratic in a sense uniquely American.

To you, gentlemen, who graduate this week, I venture to hope that President Eliot's words may have special significance. They carry to you, from another confused and dangerous era, strength and quiet assurance. They ring with confidence in the ability of each individual to work out his own destiny and by virtue of his own endeavors to win a satisfying place in some hierarchy of values. To all citizens of the country I believe these phrases of Mr. Eliot have meaning in these days. They represent the quintessence of all that is opposed to the doctrine of the totalitarian states, whether such states stem from socialism on the one hand or mad nationalism on the other.

May I suggest to each one of you that you take some time off, after the Commencement festivities are over, and consider the whole question of aristocracy. We have had a torrent of words about democracy in recent years, but few about aristocracy. Thanks to those who tried to hold a popular front, we have had trouble enough with defining democracy. Failure to make Mr. Eliot's definition a living reality may have made us shy

away from this word aristocracy. Yet by a reconsideration of the problems implicit in his few sentences, I suggest we might evolve working drawings for a type of American society to which both the right and left wings of political opinion might pledge their loyalty. We might find a base from which to shoot down, as it were, two types of enemy planes harassing us today: one type carrying bombs labeled, "Why should I struggle to make the country safe for greedy capitalists?"; the other with incendiary weapons carrying the question, "If the U.S.A. is to be run by the New Deal extremists, is it worth saving?"

An elite of excellence and of character — such is the American tradition. An elite chosen afresh with each succeeding generation — neither the accidents of birth nor education suffice according to this ideal to give a man a high place among his fellowmen. There is a cold comfort in this doctrine for many a college graduate, for it declares clearly that there should be no magic password accompanying a diploma. We have all

been led astray in our thinking by the beautiful phrase, "higher education." In the opinion of some wise men who have studied our schools and colleges, these words should be deleted from current usage. I agree. Education is best thought of in horizontal, not vertical terms. You, gentlemen, for example, have had a longer education than the ninety per cent of your contemporaries who ceased their formal studies at the end of high school or sooner. Whether you and the others who graduate from our colleges this June were the best ten per cent of your age on which the public could have spent its money, is a question. Whether each of you has been well advised to pass the four years as you have is still another question. But at all events, do not think of your education as "higher." If there be a hierarchy based on the length of formal education, then the doctors of public health are kings indeed! Their course occupies approximately twelve years beyond school, as compared to your mere four.

Each honest calling, each walk of life, has its own elite, its own aristocracy based on

excellence of performance. This is the American tradition which President Eliot was applying to Harvard College. There will always be the false snobbery which tries to place one vocation above another. The vice each of you is most likely to suffer from in this respect is intellectual snobbery. When you are about to yield to this academic disease, remember that, whether you like it or not, aristocracy of the intellect is as un-American as one based on "the stupid and pretentious caste of wealth or birth." To be sure, there is a group of leaders within each of the learned professions. To that, in Mr. Eliot's words, one may aspire to belong. But that distinction is based on merit and achievement. Mere undertaking of so-called intellectual labors gives you no rank in any proper scale. You will become a member of the aristocracy in the American sense only if your accomplishments and integrity earn this appellation.

But perhaps I am speaking to you gentlemen too personally. Let me revert to my original theme: the necessity of reinvigorat-

ing our loyalties, those of our generation and those of mine. I have spoken of the significance of an American definition of aristocracy, an American concept of the elite — an elite, I again remind you, not dependent on the inherited prestige of wealth or position, but rising from ability and character — an aristocracy restricted to no one pursuit, no one field of endeavor. It seems to me important that such a definition be made a prerequisite for a national ideal to which we can pledge our faith. On our success or failure in giving flesh and blood to such an idea the future course of our national history may depend.

To illustrate this point, may I in conclusion venture to read you a few sentences from the famous letter of Lord Macaulay to the biographer of Thomas Jefferson. In that letter, some of you may recall, written in 1857, Macaulay predicted the eventual collapse of any nation which had universal suffrage. England he felt was safe, for he boasted that in England, to use his own words, "The supreme power is in the hands

of a class, numerous indeed, but select, of an educated class, of a class which is, and knows itself to be deeply interested in the security of property and the maintenance of order."

On the other hand, prophesied Macaulay, when the United States comes to a period of depression and unemployment, this nation will be unable to ride the storm. Through such evil times the Whig historian wished us a good deliverance. "But," he said, "my reason and my wishes are at war; and I cannot help foreboding the worst. It is quite plain that your government will never be able to restrain a distressed and discontented majority, for with you the majority is the government, and has the rich, who are always a minority, absolutely at its mercy. . . . I seriously apprehend that you will, in some such season of adversity as I have described, do things which will prevent prosperity from returning."

Some of you may have heard this pessimistic letter repeated very often in the last half dozen years. Some of you may feel that the crisis which Macaulay predicted is close

at hand. If so, an answer given nearly seventy years ago by a Civil War veteran, a future president of the United States, General James A. Garfield, may be both relevant and heartening. Personally I may say it is the only answer to Macaulay's letter that I have seen which will stand against thoughtful analysis. It is an answer given only four years after Mr. Eliot's inaugural address. It speaks in terms of the same characteristic American spirit — speaks with calm optimism of the unique nature of our institutions.

In an address in 1873 on "The Future of the Republic: its Dangers and its Hopes," General Garfield referred to Macaulay's letter with these words: "I venture the declaration," he said, "that this opinion of Macaulay's is vulnerable on several grounds. It leaves out the great counter-balancing force of universal education. But furthermore, it is based upon a belief from which few if any British writers have been able to emancipate themselves; namely, the belief that mankind are born into permanent classes, and that in the main they must live, work, and die in the

fixed class or condition in which they are born. It is hardly possible for a man reared in an aristocracy like that of England to eliminate this conviction from his mind. . . .”

An aristocracy like England — note this phrase. “The English theory of national stability,” continued Garfield, “is, that there must be a permanent class who shall hold in their own hands so much of the wealth, the privilege, and the political power of the kingdom, that they can compel the admiration and obedience of all other classes. . . . Where such permanent classes exist, the conflict of which Macaulay speaks is inevitable.”

Mark these words carefully, gentlemen, for I believe they entitle General Garfield to high credit for political foresight. To my mind, the inevitable conflict of which he speaks, a conflict which is sure to come when permanent classes and universal suffrage exist in one nation, has been in progress in Great Britain during the past few years. It seems to me that in the last decade the political forces in England have been paralyzed by a deep cleavage between the two major

parties, a cleavage reflecting the struggle of which Garfield spoke.

But whether I am right or not in my interpretation of current history, let me finish Garfield's statement: "We point to the fact," said the Civil War general, "that in this country there are no classes in the British sense of the word — no impassable barriers of caste. Now that slavery is abolished we can truly say that in our political society there run no fixed horizontal strata above which none can pass. Our society resembles rather the waves of the ocean, whose every drop may move freely among its fellows, and may rise toward the light until it flashes on the crest of the highest wave."

"Our society resembles rather the waves of the ocean, whose every drop may move freely among its fellows. . . ." These magnificent, brave words, gentlemen, summarize for me the unique ideal of American life. They supplement and explain Mr. Eliot's concept of an aristocracy of excellence and of integrity. As long as they express the fundamentals of our social philosophy — the vision

towards which we as a people strive — we still have a firm basis on which the citizens of this country may stand united. Through the willingness of all contending groups to labor devoutly for this unique American ideal, a true national loyalty can be securely anchored, the faith of all can be pledged to a unifying tradition and a common cause. Then, and only then, may we as a democratic free people face the future with real confidence. Then, and only then, may we hope to weather the tempests of our time.

## IV

### “THINK ON THESE THINGS” \*

I TAKE as my text for this Baccalaureate Sermon the well-known words of St. Paul: “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things.”

“If there be any virtue, if there be any praise.” How effectively this vast understatement cuts the ground out from beneath the arguments of the cynic! It demolishes the position of those who pride themselves on their total skepticism. It forestalls the attack of those who doubt the significance of any value judgment, of those who question the ability of the human race to set up an enduring standard of right and wrong. For, caught off his guard, even the most skillful

\* Baccalaureate Sermon delivered on June 15, 1941.

cynic will admit the existence of some virtue, be it only his own virtue as a dispassionate dissector of the universe.

"If there be any virtue, if there be any praise." The insertion of these conditional clauses in St. Paul's exhortation to think on "things of good report" reminds us of the antiquity of a modern problem — the problem of how to reaffirm effectively our faith in the reality of those things of which St. Paul speaks. For disillusionment is not a new product of civilization. So-called "lost generations" have been a periodic occurrence in human history. As one century follows another, ages of faith have alternated with those of doubt; the pendulum of human emotion has swung first towards exaggerated credulity and then towards equally exaggerated incredulity. And even when we make such statements we are, of course, speaking only in terms of prevailing sentiment. We ignore the existence of those silent dissenters of all shades of opinion who in every age are neither extreme heretics nor strict followers of the reigning cult. Even in the periods

marked by the greatest scorn for all ideals there have been some men of firm belief — just as in times of the ascendancy of the strictest dogma there have been some who indulged in the luxury of doubt.

In recent years many men of penetrating intelligence have been busy blowing to bits almost every combination of words which express high human aspirations. Today we live amidst the rubble left by these nihilists. All who read and write can testify to the effectiveness of their work. Phrases once honored, and hallowed by usage, have been damaged apparently beyond repair, and now lie in the ash heap of outworn folklore. Amidst this devastation we pick our way as best we can. Any interpretation of human conduct which is not stated in terms of selfishness, greed and lust is regarded in many circles with suspicion. One handles fine phrases and noble sentiments as cautiously as an unexploded bomb. A time fuse set by a "debunker" may be ready to destroy a speaker's words before his face.

Now the desolation which appalls so many

of our contemporaries seems to me only the natural consequence of what has gone before. The time was ripe some years ago for a revolt. For three generations since the Civil War, the last great spiritual crisis in this country, the man on the street who is the ultimate consumer has patiently endured an ever-increasing flow of rhetoric. As literacy spread among the population, so spread the sea of words. Fine phrases were used to make palatable a variety of dubious enterprises. Politicians, advertisers, newspaper men and public speakers, including many in academic halls, have competed with each other in their endeavors to debase the verbal coinage. Before you gentlemen of the Senior Class were born, the inevitable reaction had set in. In our own time it reached its height. Having seen so much hypocrisy unmasked, we automatically expect to find deceit lurking behind what our grandfathers would have acclaimed "noble and uplifting sentiments."

How we are to devise a modern set of phrases to replace the old, I do not know. But the need for some method of communi-

cating from one individual to another the emotional overtones of a certain type of value judgment is pathetically apparent. Because we cannot today convey adequately through words our feelings about one kind of human behavior, we tend to deny the existence of such behavior. We have no difficulty in analyzing the past and present in terms of self-interest. Hence all those phases of history which illustrate purely selfish motives have been in recent years exhaustively documented. But since we have the greatest difficulty in expressing in modern terms such ideals as truth and beauty, not to mention justice, self-sacrifice and service, we do our best to forget many great chapters of history. We drift unconsciously into the fallacious position of viewing the activities of the human race through the glasses of complete cynicism. This distortion of the past does not improve our ability to understand the present.

Take the current debate between interventionists and isolationists, for example. A visitor from another planet listening to the argu-

ments of either side would be inclined to concur with those harsh judges of modern America who declare that we are a nation of materialists. He would be inclined to say that we are a cold, calculating nation concerned only with our own selfish interests. And he would conclude that collectively and individually we are a money-getting, ignoble people.

In my opinion nothing could be further from the truth. As a matter of fact, we are a nation of idealists. Our great decisions on national policy have been based on our adherence to some ideal. An impartial study of American history should convince anyone of that. An analysis of America today will prove, I think, that there has been no alteration in our makeup. To be sure, the fashion at present is to dodge what our fathers would have called the moral issues. Arguments have to be "realistic," "hard-boiled," unemotional. But in reality there has been no decrease in the intensity of our idealism. There has been only a great desire to avoid the charge of hypocrisy — a desire which often

leads even the most zealous idealist to present his case as though he were arguing to fellow gangsters.

That we are still a nation of idealists seems to me to be amply demonstrated by the events of the last twelve months. In effect, a gigantic conflict of ideals has been in progress in the United States, a conflict between the ideal of peace and the ideal of freedom. We as a people have been torn between our hatred of war and our hatred of Hitler's philosophy, between our desire for peace and our desire to do our part in defending human decency. A nation caught in such an internal moral battle must suffer the tortures of a man upon the rack. Or, perhaps I should say, must suffer the tortures of an individual undergoing a similar struggle within himself. Indeed, not a few individuals in this last year have faced the bitter experience of cutting through the emotional impasse which results from the sudden collision of two ideals.

"Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure." Collectively,

America by the vehemence of the debate between the idealists of two schools gives witness to her passion for these things! This fact may well serve as a foundation for the hopes of all those individuals who commence their life work in the dark days in which we live. It may serve not only as a foundation for their hopes but as a bench mark from which they may survey the future. For in a society in which there is virtue and there is praise, and in a company of men who ponder on truth and justice and things of good report, life is worth the pain of living; but in a society where such possibilities are denied, mere existence becomes a daily burden.

All prediction is a matter of probability. But in individual decisions it is often not so much the degree of the probability which must be weighed as the consequences to a man's life of acting on one reading of the future rather than another. The attitude of many of the older students in France three or four years ago, we are told, was one of fatalistic despair. "What's the use of studying?" they argued. "We'll all be dead in a

few years, soon after the war breaks out." Events proved this prophecy to be wrong. Most of them are now in prison camps, their country is in chains.

It is conceivable that the next fifty years for the United States will be as black as the last year has been for France. I believe the chances of such an eventuality to be negligible. It is conceivable that this country will have to be an armed camp for two decades yet to come. I think the chances for such a prolonged intense military period to be small. It is possible that those who hold dear the things of which St. Paul spoke may be driven into secret hiding places in this country. I think such an event most improbable of all. But even if the chances were two to one that the worst of these misfortunes would occur, the wise and courageous man will plan his life not for the eventuality that would frustrate his hopes, but for the alternative that gives promise for the long years ahead. Only savages believe as the sun darkens by eclipse that it will never shine again.

Sooner or later the present collective mad-

ness of a portion of the human race will pass. In the meantime, those who value the intellectual and spiritual fruits of western civilization will keep ever before their eyes the part each one must play in a world returned to sanity.

For as long a time as recorded human history, men have struggled not only against each other but with themselves. The problem of evil is older than the written word. And if there be no evidence that evil can be eliminated from a world peopled with human beings, there is also no evidence that in the long run evil will exterminate its opposite. The failure of Utopian hopes for a rapid moral progress of civilization need not drive us into the rash assumption that "things of good report" will soon be forever past. If the story of western civilization is black with crimes committed for personal aggrandizement with the aid of pious fraud, it is also full of examples of a quite different sort. In each age and in every country some men have lied, stolen, desecrated and destroyed; but others have sought truth, created beauty,

endeavored to live honestly and to help mankind. For centuries some few have been ready to betray their friends, even their kinsmen, without scruple. Such a one was Sir George Downing, a member of the first class to graduate from Harvard. But others have remained true to their trust even through torture and to final death. Such a one was Hugh Peter, a member of the first Board of Overseers of this College. It is easy to cite cases where collective greed and self-interest have determined the course of history. But it is equally easy, if one so desires, to quote chapter and verse to show that human conduct has often been motivated solely by a passionate adherence to an ideal. And with such stout belief comes the fortitude to bear misfortune, the patience to endure adversity, the confidence that insures that better days are indeed ahead.

Gentlemen of the Class of 1941, I hardly need remind you this is no usual Commencement. For the first time in a generation, the classes graduating here and elsewhere must listen to a direct call for assistance by the na-

tional government. However gladly each of you may carry out his assignment in the defense work of the country, there will be for most of you some frustration of your ambitions. A sense of grim futility may at any moment descend upon you as the terrible drama of the next few years unrolls. If so, you will have need to seek a renewal of your spiritual vitality, of your confidence in peaceful and constructive days. For this reason I have ventured to remind you that the pages of history are not an unmitigated chronicle of evil genius, but quite as much a record of things of good report. For this reason I have ventured to bring before your mind the fact that in the present apparent confusion of our countrymen there are signs of an ineradicable belief in whatsoever is honest and just and pure. Gentlemen, whether the months ahead be full of good or evil, think on these things.

## V

### TO THE CLASS OF 1942 \*

ON Commencement morning, according to the ancient formula, it is the privilege of the President of the University to admit the class graduating from the College into the "fellowship of educated men." The significance of both the academic ritual of commencement and the phrase "fellowship of educated men" lies in the word fellowship. It is this word which denotes the link connecting all generations of Harvard graduates — connecting them with one another and with the graduates of all other American colleges. You who now graduate from Harvard enter, as it were, into a band of chosen men who have shared a certain experience. You have served your apprenticeship during the years of youth in contact with a great and living tradition based on the cultural inheritance of our civilization. From this experience provided for

\* Baccalaureate Sermon, June 7, 1942.

you by organized society you have derived benefits which will endure throughout your life. Recognizing the peculiar obligation placed upon you by these benefits received, you together with all members of the fellowship of educated men go forth now to place your talents at the disposal of your country.

To many generations the fulfillment of the obligation never takes the form of a clear-cut call for action; it is rather diffused throughout a man's career, intermingled with his personal responsibilities and ambitions. But to you of the Class of 1942, immediately upon graduation, and for a few still earlier, the country has turned for special service. For a time the imperious demands of a nation fighting a desperate war must transcend all else. Throwing aside all other plans, casting aside for the moment hopes nurtured in the days of peace, you respond and each proceeds to take his appointed place in the vast national effort.

You entered this College in the days when the collective energies of the American people were so bent on peace that hardly a soul

would admit the possibility of war. It has been no easy matter for a free people with a will to peace to become suddenly an embattled nation. To none has the transition been more difficult than to those who now leave our colleges to encounter the hazards of war itself. At this Commencement, therefore, I count it a special privilege to address you as members of the graduating class. I wish that to every one of you I could say a personal word. I wish that I could convey the understanding pride and confidence with which the College salutes you on this graduation day.

I have spoken of the link which connects one college generation with another. In the case of this College, the succession of these links, the chain of graduated classes, now spans exactly three hundred years. The members of the Class of 1642 were the first to receive the bachelor's degree, from the hands of Henry Dunster. From one point of view those first alumni of three centuries ago seem as remote as prehistoric man. Yet, viewed from another angle, the long interval

of time appears to vanish. When the Class of 1642 graduated, a civil war was brewing in England. Half the members of that class crossed the seas to join with other Puritans whose victorious armies were to rule England for nearly twenty years. 1642 was a time of anxiety and trouble for Harvard men — a time that “tried men’s souls.” So was 1775, so was 1861, so was 1917, and so is 1942. The members of all the war classes in the history of Harvard are united by a special bond. For the questions which face young men in times of war have changed little in the course of three hundred years. All the material changes of the centuries and many of the cultural differences that separate one climate of opinion from another disappear when a crisis brings an individual face to face with the fundamental problems of human destiny.

Days of anguish and suffering are days when individuals, both young and old, must probe more deeply in their search for a solid foundation on which to build their faith. A philosophy of life sufficient for calm and un-

eventful periods is all too often inadequate in time of stress. To be sure, sooner or later most men have to reëxamine the basic assumptions from which they direct their lives, they have to rethink their answers to the age-old questions arising when the stark facts of tragedy and evil suddenly obtrude. But for young men in particular, war compresses the normal span of years during which a satisfying outlook upon the world may be attained. Some answer must be found at once, some solidity achieved in a universe which seems to have exploded into chaos. Such being the case, the least that a person in my position can do is to try to speak honestly and frankly. One man's religion will rarely satisfy another. But a statement of a point of view may be of assistance to others in formulating their own beliefs. Therefore, I shall venture to try to outline the framework within which I believe a young American who has not subscribed to a formal creed may today find the faith that he requires.

"There are no atheists in fox-holes" — these words were used by a war correspondent

writing from Bataan. They are typical of the United States of the twentieth century; no other age would have said so much by indirection. Affirmations of faith by earlier generations of Americans were bold and direct, though often couched in the narrow vocabulary of a special creed. Not so today. This is not an age when one wears the heart upon the sleeve. No Gallup poll can estimate the inner thoughts of the millions who constitute this nation. In these times few laymen venture to think out loud on questions which once were heatedly debated up and down the land. Religious toleration has by necessity driven theological controversy underground. Indeed, in many quarters it is thought to be un-American even to inquire as to a man's religion. But it is easy to mistake a changing mode of expression for a fundamental alteration in men's hearts. I venture to believe that even today, not only under enemy fire but under any circumstances of a desperate and gruelling nature, few atheists would be found in any group born and bred in the American tradition.

Some of you may well challenge this statement. Let me, therefore, explain what I have in mind. In the first place, experience seems to show that few men will fight fiercely against desperate odds unless they are imbued with a living faith. In the second place, for nine men out of ten such faith must arise from the background of their lives — it must be indigenous to the society they defend. And it would be my contention that for most of the American people today the final answers to the questions propounded by the facts of life and death must be in terms that no atheist would admit. For a vast majority of us the answers will involve the basic tenets of Christianity, even for those who do not count themselves as members of any church. For, to my mind, the whole development of the American conception of democracy has been conditioned by the existence throughout our history of a powerful religious tradition. In the earlier years of the evolution of what we call the American way of life, this driving religious force came predominantly from the dissenting protestant sects. There-

fore, I shall speak of the historical religious tradition as the spirit of the Reformation. In opposition to this religious current there flowed an ever-increasing secular stream of thought and action. This antithetical force was the bold, adventurous self-assured belief in man's capacity to aid himself — the spirit of the Renaissance. Out of the conflict of these two — the spirit of the Reformation and the spirit of the Renaissance — has come a synthesis; the American belief in democracy, a form of government which both guarantees the integrity of the individual soul and allows man's potential capacities to develop to the full.

Perhaps I may illustrate the struggle between the spirit of the Renaissance and the spirit of the Reformation by a famous Harvard story. It is usually told to illustrate that bygone age when university administration was an intensely personal concern of a college president. Emerson Hall was in process of construction. The design included an inscription on the north façade over the doorway leading to Sever and Robinson Halls.

The Department of Philosophy had decided that this inscription should read, "Man is the measure of all things," speaking in the spirit of the Renaissance. But President Eliot quietly decided otherwise. When the professors returned from the summer vacation they found the building essentially complete, and cut into the stone were the words: "What is man that Thou are mindful of him?" Now this story may well be apocryphal, but I cherish it none the less. For the two famous quotations which are made to contend for the place of honor symbolize the two great cultural streams which together have made the America in which we live.

The Puritans who founded this College were bent on eliminating from their religion every vestige of magic and superstition. For that contribution to the evolution of American thought many of us honor them today. From the cross currents of other dissenting sects and as a strange transformation of puritan dogma itself came the idea of religious toleration and the reaffirmation of the spiritual basis of individual freedom. For

these elements in our national life, all who understand the nature of the present struggle must pay a tribute of deep gratitude.

In the course of the nineteenth century came the industrial revolution and with it increasing optimism. Not merely optimism about material progress but a utopian philosophy became generally accepted. To men who in their lifetime had seen the modern age of machines develop, nothing seemed impossible. To them and their children there appeared to be no limit to what man might accomplish, no limit to the extent to which he might transform the universe materially, socially, ethically, spiritually. As has been said, the twentieth century in America renounced a belief in all miracles save one, the most miraculous of all — the rapid and complete transformation of man himself. It was as if one generalized about the weather from the experience of a sunny day.

To some who view the present chaos in the light of the follies of the last twenty years, no small measure of blame must be laid at the door of the prevalent utopian philosophy.

One has only to recall the slogan, "War to end war," and the famous pact to outlaw war to illustrate the point. Surely the history of the United States from 1917 to 1941 shows how the utopian philosophy may defeat the very movements it would foster. Dreams based on a misconception of a total situation are bound to produce a severe reaction. When impossible ideals are set before men's minds, no harvests except bitter disillusionment and cynicism can be expected.

The danger exists again today. We are fighting to defend human liberty and render secure the American way of life. We desire to prevent the recurrence of a devastating world-wide struggle every generation. We want and expect to have the United States a better place to live in when the war is over. Limited objectives we must set. But let us proceed cautiously in painting too rosy a picture of the world or even of the United States after the war is over. Modern civilization will be hard pressed, indeed, if another era of cynicism is the product of utopian war aims of this struggle!

Let me make it clear that in finding fault with the utopian philosophy of the last forty years I am no defeatist as to human hopes. I am confident that in your lifetime you will see a new flowering of those aspirations which were expressed by the founders of the Republic. It seems to me possible to hold the balance even between the optimistic spirit of the Renaissance which sets no bounds to man's ambitions and the spiritual forces of the Reformation. And by holding such a balance, I believe the spiritual values basic to American democracy may be maintained and strengthened.

But, on the other hand, it seems to me evident that man's nature is such that all men at some time and some men at all times will feel and behave not as though they were true Christians but as though they were devils incarnate. To my mind, it is the first duty of an individual to oppose such thoughts and behavior either within himself or in other men. To the extent that a man does this he has courage, which is good; to the extent that he does not he is a coward, and that is bad. I

use the absolutes good and bad without apology. For when it comes to passing a value judgment on courage and the lack of it, even the most hardened cynic, the most confirmed relativist in the field of morals, will hardly dissent from the verdict of all ages.

To my mind, the utopians who foresee the future in terms of a world made perfect by technology and the applied social sciences and those who believe in a complete spiritual regeneration of a majority of men are equally mistaken. The facts of history and of human nature to me speak of a universe constructed on totally different principles. The problem of evil seems to be as ever-present as the air we breathe. Why this should be, I do not pretend to know; nor do I believe that man will ever fully understand, though he must never cease to try.

If I may speak personally, for me the whole story of human history would be only a "tale told by an idiot" and my life and yours would be totally devoid of meaning if its prime significance lay in the visible results of an individual's or a nation's actions. In

terms of my faith it is unthinkable to say, as some have said, that men died in vain in certain wars because the proclaimed objective was never won. To me whether a man lives or dies in vain can never be measured by the collective activity of his fellows, never by the fruits of war or peace. It can be measured only by the way he faces his own problems, by the success or failure of the inner conflict within his soul. And of this no one may know save God.

For centuries Christians have quarreled as to the answer to the question: "What is man that Thou art mindful of him?" and I am inclined to think they will continue to disagree on this subject for many generations more. But it is the assertion implied in this question, not the answer, that is basic to any faith. And it is this assertion that gives significance to the individual, that makes imperative human liberty, the very cause for which we fight. As a man views the past record of the human race and grapples with his own problems, as he strives to find the good and combat the evil, as he gains spirit-

ual strength one day and loses it another, as he drives forward with all his power yet realizing his inadequacies, he must say with Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

Gentlemen, I realize that in attempting to speak freely to you I have both oversimplified the problem and trespassed on areas properly reserved for theologians. I have spoken in terms of war. But when you return to the ways of peace, you will have no less need for a solution of the eternal problem of human destiny. You will have no less need for a militant faith. Superstition and cynicism, the ever-present selfishness and cruelty of man, will be ready to challenge your strength. For the struggle is never-ending. May you have wisdom, skill, and courage in the days to come.



THE USE OF OUR COLLEGES  
IN TIME OF WAR



THE USE OF OUR COLLEGES IN TIME  
OF WAR: WIDENING THE BASE  
FOR OFFICER MATERIAL \*

THE President has warned us we must prepare for two or three years more of battle. We may be confident that, if we are now ready to throw all our national resources into a unified effort, the war can be won within that time. But if, on the other hand, we now delay and hesitate in our plans for 1944 or 1945, the struggle might even then be inconclusive. There is no need to portray the gravity of such a situation. Every year that victory eludes us multiplies manifold the dangers to our civilization. Beyond some date, if war continues, lies defeat for this century's hopes for human freedom.

I am deeply concerned with the part that American youth will play in the war in the

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next few years. There is a fairly sharp dividing line that separates untrained and inexperienced youth from those whose skills or experience are of direct value to the nation. Now it is relatively easy to determine whether a person who has a job is doing more for the country by staying on that job or by joining the armed forces. Indeed, even if the man in question happens to have no job at the moment, but does have a certain skill based on education or experience, it is relatively easy to determine where his place should be. But with boys in school or college such criteria do not apply. One is dealing here with potential power, not developed capacity. If Selective Service were to be expanded to include those of eighteen or nineteen years of age, as may well be necessary, a different set of standards must be developed to define a necessary man. Indeed, with the lowering of the draft age to twenty, the difficulty of assessing latent talent already becomes evident. From now on both the draft boards and the Army will increasingly face the complex problem of how to

find the best use for promising but untrained material.

In time of war the demands of the Army and the Navy for able-bodied young men of fighting age overshadow all other considerations. Therefore, until the War and Navy Departments could complete their plans, the situation was by necessity difficult and perplexing. The last five months have been trying times for young men in our colleges and universities; the confusion has been great. On the one hand came statements from some high quarters that all students would serve their country best by remaining at their studies. On the other hand, various branches of the armed services actively recruited men from eighteen years of age; furthermore, the prospect of induction through Selective Service at twenty loomed ahead. Every young man naturally wishes to have his services utilized by the country as effectively as possible. College students have no desire to be placed in the position of letting some other group do the fighting for them. No one wishes to use his talents to avoid the risks of war.

The question of draft deferments added a complicating factor. Shortly after the Selective Service Act came into operation the colleges and universities were asked to coöperate by requesting deferment of certain types of students — for instance, students in aeronautics and mechanical engineering. In the days when we were building up a relatively small army from a large pool of potential soldiers and our chief contribution to the war was an ever-expanding arsenal, such a policy was clearly wise. Since Pearl Harbor, however, the situation has completely altered. In the first place, the country now recognizes that the needs of the armed forces for young men override all other considerations. In the second place, the question of serving the country on the home front or in a combat unit is no longer an impersonal abstract problem. For many individuals the decision will be literally one of life or death. The hazards of war are by no means equally distributed; there is no use pretending that all forms of national service today are equally dangerous or grueling.

This fact which we cannot blink makes it

imperative, I believe, that as far as possible the decision as to where a man will serve should be made by the government itself. Now that the Army and the Navy have come to the colleges with definite plans and the Manpower Commission has been appointed, the matter of deferment should be a governmental responsibility. Such is already the case in the field of medical education. It is no longer necessary for a university to ask for the deferment of medical students, since all who are physically fit can be enrolled in the Medical Reserve Corps of the Army or the Navy. But this principle might well be extended to other specialized branches of the services. It applies just as truly to the demands of industry for college men. Here again the Federal Government must soon decide. If the Manpower Commission surveys the problem and concludes that some able-bodied young men must be trained for nonmilitary posts, then the Commission should pick the men and order them into this branch of national service. In time of war no college or individual should be asked to

shoulder the heavy responsibility of determining who should face danger and who should not.

Those who are clearly debarred by physical handicap from the combat services can nevertheless prepare themselves to play an important role in the national effort. They are the young men who must help staff our industries and our governmental agencies. As young executive assistants, as laboratory workers, as civil servants, as engineers, they must labor at desks or in factories as part of the vast army of production. The education of these men should be directed with such tasks in mind. Probably every college student has now been able to estimate, with a physician's aid, what his chances are of passing the physical examination for the Army or the Navy. On that estimate hinge his plans for the immediate future. But even those who cannot join the armed services will probably wish to accelerate their course of study. For by so doing they will at the earliest moment become participating members in the gigantic national undertaking. The selection

and training of young men take on an urgency that may revolutionize our colleges and universities.

For those who are able-bodied, the situation has by now been clarified. The Navy, through its V-1 program, and the Army, through its Aviation Cadet program and its Enlisted Reserve Corps, offer opportunities to college students to "join up." No one can longer complain that orders from Washington are lacking. In each of these programs for training officers a portion, at least, of college education is assured to each individual who enrolls. And while neither the Navy nor the Army promises a commission, the avowed object is to develop leadership through college education. I understand that approximately 160,000 men of each college year can be enrolled under these three programs. I assume some method will be devised by which this overall program can be joined to the scheme by which medical students are now enrolled, and that due regard will be paid to the training of the scientific specialists who are needed in modern war.

It should be a matter of record that this scheme was not formulated by the colleges. And whether it is successful or not must be measured, not by its effect on the colleges (which in terms of enrollment will be good), but by its effectiveness in utilizing the young talent of the nation.

On this latter point some of us have serious reservations. To my mind, there is one inherent weakness which is in no sense a fault of the Navy or the Army. Indeed, it was beyond their power alone to obviate this defect, for it resides in our system of education. I refer to the fact that equality of educational opportunity is still far from an accomplished fact. This is true in spite of our magnificent state- and city-supported colleges and universities, and in spite of our scholarships in privately controlled institutions. Compared with any other country, the United States is miles ahead, of course. Never before in history has it been possible for so many of each generation to obtain an education commensurate with their talents and without regard to economic status. And this is so because of

the miraculous development of the public schools during the last fifty years. Nevertheless, anyone who is familiar with the operation of our educational system realizes that all too often accidents of geography and of parental fortune determine who goes to college and who does not. Every survey of our educational system has emphasized this fact. No one can deny that there are large numbers of potential officers in each age group who do not now enter college. Many of these, because of financial pressure, are leaving high school and taking employment in war industries. It can be argued that for the moment they are of as much value in industry as they would be in the Army. But if they possess the native ability to be officers, they will be ill-prepared for a commission when they are later inducted into the Army through Selective Service.

Consider these figures. There are approximately 1,200,000 in each age group — that is, there are 1,200,000 young men who, each year, might enter colleges and universities. The actual number enrolled is somewhat

less than 20 per cent — somewhat less than 250,000. (This figure includes those who enter two-year junior colleges, which I understand are included in the Army and the Navy scheme.) Now I have no doubt that the armed forces will select from the 250,000 the most promising material. I do not doubt that the further “screening” or sifting by examination at the end of two years of work will be effective. But clearly, a million of the contemporaries of those chosen *will not be considered in this collegiate competition*; they cannot stand as candidates because they are not enrolled in a four-year college or university or a junior college. Can anyone doubt that of this large pool of a million young men there are at least another 160,000 of ability and native worth equal to that of the students selected from the college population?

To be sure, when these boys are inducted they will have the same opportunity to be chosen for officer training camps as those who have had college training. The Army has wisely, I believe, required that even the

members of the Enlisted Reserve Corps must compete with all the other privates during the first thirteen weeks of training. But if two years or more in college is of value to an officer, as the present scheme implies, then the non-college man starts with a big handicap against him. Native talent developed by education is what the Army requires for leaders. It would seem in the best interest of the nation to select this talent from as wide a group as possible, at least from the entire number who are graduated each year from school. Personally, I wish it had been possible for the government to have chosen the 160,000 men purely on the basis of merit, without regard for their economic situation, and to have financed this group for whatever further education was required by the Army or the Navy. Such a scheme would have more nearly opened a military career to the talented, irrespective of the accidents of birth.

A college education must be founded on the work of the secondary schools. Therefore, on any basis, those who dropped out

of school would be ineligible for further academic training. And, as I have already pointed out, there is a heavy shrinkage during the high-school years. Nearly 40 per cent of those who enter high school leave before graduation; nevertheless some 600,000 boys are graduated each year and are thus ready to proceed to college. It is from this group — the graduates of our secondary schools — that I should like to have had the choice made; not from the 250,000 who, to some extent for accidental reasons, proceed to college. Furthermore, I believe such a plan would largely diminish the loss of promising boys from the upper high-school classes. The very fact that there might be an opportunity on graduation to be chosen for a selected corps destined for further education would have the effect of keeping the right boys in school.

I realize that such a scheme presents formidable administrative difficulties. But I believe they could be overcome almost as readily as those inherent in Selective Service. The pattern of a decentralized administra-

tion through well-chosen state boards has already been supplied. Special boards appointed for the purpose could rely on the appraisals of high-school principals in making a fair selection of local nominees. From the candidates thus presented on a quota basis by each locality it seems probable that the Army and the Navy could choose as readily as from the lists of freshmen in our colleges.

Of course, the establishment of such a training corps financed by the government would require Congressional action, and large sums of money would be involved. No one, therefore, can justly criticize the Army and the Navy for not starting down this road. It would not be difficult, however, at some later time to modify the present plans in the direction just outlined. In the meantime a widespread system of military scholarships, carefully allotted to various areas and impartially administered, would widen the basis for selection. Many who are familiar with the educational problems of boys from sixteen to twenty years of age believe that it

would be possible to grant financial aid wisely even to those in school. This would be particularly true in time of war, for the objectives of further education can be defined in terms of the Army and the Navy. Qualities of leadership, of general intelligence, of moral stamina, are primarily required. These, together with special aptitudes for aviation on the one hand or the physical sciences on the other, would indicate the desired man.

In short, I believe two steps should be taken to utilize more effectively the latent talent of our younger men. Both cost money, but I believe that, solely in terms of the winning of the war, both steps should be worth all the millions that would be required. The first step is to keep the most promising youths in high school; the second, to send them on to college. Federal funds would be required, but this does not mean Federal control of education. For the money could be best spent through local agencies and by those closely in touch with the public school system and our colleges. This is not the place to outline the details of such proposals. It is for Con-

gress to formulate the required legislation and provide the funds. If the country demands such a revision of our educational pattern as a war measure, it will before long take place. To my mind it is clear that we must plan now for the officers who are to be drawn in later years from the age groups which have not yet been called. To that end, ability must be discovered and financed by the government so that the very best men will be available for the nation's needs.

In conclusion, may I point out that the method of selecting officers for the Army and the Navy has significance for the post-war period as well as for the war. To the extent that a college education is a road to promotion, and to the extent that a college education is a privileged position based on family finances, we are hardening the social strata as we expand our Army and our Navy. Conversely, to the extent that we freely open the road to the commissioned ranks by eliminating the economic barriers to further education, we are increasing the fluidity of our social system. To my mind, the American

interpretation of democracy, the very cause for which we fight, rests on the flexibility of our national life — it rests on our denial of the doctrine of hereditary privilege. For one hundred and fifty years we have repudiated the idea of a ruling caste; we have affirmed our adherence to the ideal of a classless nation. Such phrases as “There are no classes in America,” and “Three generations from shirt sleeves to shirt sleeves,” have been the hallmarks of America’s social order. Repeatedly in our history these unique features of our society have been underlined.

Time and again the characteristic American doctrine was expressed during the last century — in an era when man’s hopes ran high. An expanding economy, free lands, the spirit of the frontier, made this unique American ideal almost a reality in the nineteenth century. The last fifty years, however, have seen a reversal of the process. The frontier vanished, and the urbanization and industrialization of our national life began. Large aggregations of men were brought together to labor in expanding factories — the words

proletariat and class struggle entered the American vocabulary. All the trends except one were toward a greater stratification of our society, toward the renunciation of a cardinal principle of our early democratic faith. The one exception was the growth of our system of public education. Through that channel alone we gave new meaning to the word equality. For through free education a man's children might hope to show their worth.

I firmly believe that we must develop still further this new instrument forged by a free people. There are other methods which can be and should be devised for increasing the social mobility of our system, for increasing the ease by which the members of each new generation rise or fall according to their own efforts. But I am convinced that very largely through strengthening our system of public education we may build those bulwarks which will ensure the perpetuation of American democracy in the post-war world. I am convinced that through making real our doctrine of educational opportunity we may recapture an essential element in our democ-

racy: the birthright of opportunity which in an earlier age was the gift of the American frontier.

If I am right as to the importance of strengthening this unique feature of our social system, then the question of choosing officers in this war is of moment for two separate reasons. First, we need all the talent we can find for the military task at hand — we cannot afford to leave any portion of it untrained; second, we need to demonstrate that this republic is anxious to approach more nearly to the ideal of a nation without caste. If the two objects were in contradiction, clearly that which concerned America of the future must yield to the demands of war. For we are agreed, today, that the requirements for victory take precedence over all reforms. But, as a matter of fact, the two goals are close together. If we have a well-supported educational system by which talent reaches the college level irrespective of private income, we shall both increase the effectiveness of our leadership in battle and demonstrate the reality of our American ideal. We shall for-

ward the winning of the war and at the same time lessen those tensions between economic groupings which in the modern world are ever in danger of threatening a democracy's internal peace.

A widespread system of public and private education, a miracle judged by any other country or any other age, stands ready for our use. It is for the American people to say how this great social engine shall be employed in a total war. On the answer depends in no small measure the effectiveness of our young officers who will fight on the land, on the sea, and in the air; on the answer turns also, perhaps, the course of much of the social history of the United States in the uncertain decades yet to come.

















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